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SUBJECT: GVN Warns of Christmas Unrest in the Central Highlands

1. (SBU) Summary: Assistant Foreign Minister and Americas Department Director General Nguyen Duc Hung called in the Charge December 24 to warn of a "plot" to cause unrest in the Central Highlands -- specifically the provinces of Dak Lak, Kon Tum and Gia Lai -- and encourage ethnic minorities to cross the border into Cambodia en masse on or around the Christmas holiday. The plotters are the Montagnard Foundation (headquartered in North Carolina), remaining FULRO elements and UNHCR officials. The GVN wants religious adherents to be able to celebrate Christmas in peace and is attempting to stop the unrest before it starts, promising leniency to those involved who turn themselves in. Otherwise, the GVN will deal "severely" with those involved. The GVN would consider USG cooperation to stop these activities to be "counterterrorism cooperation" in Vietnam. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Assistant Foreign Minister and Americas Department Director General Nguyen Duc Hung called in the Charge December 24 to warn of a "situation of concern" in the Central Highlands. A/DCM accompanied. According to information the GVN has received, the Montagnard Foundation (based in North Carolina), together with remnants of FULRO and "UNHCR staff in Cambodia," are conspiring to "disturb the peace" and interfere with peaceful religious activities on and around the Christmas holiday. Most seriously, these elements will attempt to "deceive" ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands -- specifically those living in the border areas of Dak Lak, Kon Tum and Gia Lai Provinces -- and "incite them" to cross the border en masse into Cambodia, AFM Hung said

3. (SBU) GVN law enforcement agencies had learned of this plot from communications by telephone and radio among plotters in the United States, Vietnam and Cambodia. This is truly "terrorism" and a "disruption of the peace," AFM Hung stressed, and the plotters seek to "encroach" on the life and property of religious adherents -- specifically Protestant believers -- in the Central Highlands.

4. (SBU) Local authorities and law enforcement officials have been in touch with religious groups and the people of these provinces to warn them of this plot and to encourage them to remain calm and not to believe or follow the "scheme" of the plotters. The GVN has also announced that those who have been involved in these "conspiracies" will be treated leniently if they turn themselves in; otherwise, those who remain "stubborn" will be dealt with "severely," AFM Hung said. The intention of the central Government and local authorities is to maintain "peaceful and happy" conditions for believers to celebrate Christmas, AFM Hung added.

5. (SBU) While the GVN understands that the USG does not support the Dega or other "separatist movements," Vietnam nonetheless urges the USG not to "involve itself" with the activities of the Montagnard Foundation and others and to cooperate with the GVN to stop "bad elements" from "causing trouble." The GVN considers cooperation with the USG in this regard to be "counterterrorism cooperation" in Vietnam.

6. (SBU) The Charge noted that the UNHCR's alleged involvement in these activities seemed highly irregular; the USG respects and works closely with the UNHCR. AFM Hung responded that the GVN is certain that both "high-level" officials and local staff are involved. In response to the Charge's urging that local authorities and law enforcement officials deal with violators of the law in a manner respectful of human rights, AFM Hung said that those who are caught will be "dealt with within the framework of the law." The GVN is attempting to have a "dialogue" with those who are or might be involved. There has not yet been a movement of people towards the border, AFM Hung concluded.

BOARDMAN